GURPS® Fourth Edition

ACTION 9™
THE CITY™

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CONTENTS

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Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition.* Page references that begin with B refer to that book, not this one.

INTRODUCTION

Action is an overwhelmingly urban genre. The templates in **GURPS Action 1: Heroes** assume that the heroes have buildings and vehicles to break into, streets to cruise, tech to play with, and lots of people to manipulate and fight; **GURPS Action 3: Furious Fists** introduces the *traceur,* who craves buildings to *climb.* **GURPS Action 4: Specialists** provides a few skill sets for rugged outdoorspeople (Bushwhacker, Cowboy, and military training for wilderness ops) – but these are seriously outnumbered by modules suited to built-up areas (Car Thief, Construction, Fireman, Parkour, and Urban Assault are made for this!) with offices (to accommodate Academics, Businessperson, and Researcher), ubiquitous technology (*many* examples), and lively social environments (for Bon Vivant, Femme Fatale, Social Engineering, Spin Doctor, etc.). As well, while **GURPS Action 5: Dictionary of Danger** explores plants, farms, and the sea, the majority of the alphabet tours construction sites, garbage dumps, high-rises, industry, and infrastructure. The bias is so pervasive that **GURPS Action 8: Twists** treats departures from it as extraordinary.

Which is as it should be! Action cinema is dominated by tales of crime and grime that unfold on the mean streets, spy flicks that showcase fancy restaurants and hotels, capers where high-rises are scaled and casinos are robbed, and thrillers whose terrorists aren't satisfied unless they're endangering millions of lives and billions of dollars of property. Car chases race the wrong way through rush-hour traffic, foot chases disrupt thronged shopping districts, and Parkour across rooftops has become obligatory. Memorable fights occur in contraband-filled warehouses, dark alleyways, and dangerous factories. Action stories owe their energy to the pressures built up in crucibles of wealth and humanity, to the decay – physical and sometimes moral – of all things urban.

There's a supplement for defining cities in relatively simple terms: **GURPS City Stats.** The catch is that it provides stats that aren't obviously useful with **Action,** which chooses not to get caught up in urban demographics, infrastructure, economics, and politics. But much as **Twists** proposes uses for **GURPS Social Engineering: Keeping in Contact** and **Pulling Rank, GURPS Action 9: The City** makes **City Stats** useful.

REQUIRED BOOKS

GURPS Action 9: The City shows how to use **GURPS City Stats** with **GURPS Action 2: Exploits.** Thus, both are necessary – and also valuable even in modern-day campaigns that don't otherwise use **GURPS Action.** If you *are* using that series, everything else in it is recommended but not required.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sean Punch set out to become a particle physicist in 1985 and ended up as **GURPS** Line Editor in 1995. In that capacity, he has written, edited, or contributed to hundreds of **GURPS** releases, revised the game into its fourth edition (2004), and been a regular contributor to *Pyramid* magazine. From 2008, he has served as lead creator of the **GURPS Action** and **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy** series; work on the latter led to his design of the **Dungeon Fantasy Roleplaying Game,** released in 2017. Sean has been a gamer since 1979, but devotes most of his spare time to Argentine tango. He lives in Montréal, Québec with *son amour,* Geneviève.

CITY, STAT!

So, you open up **GURPS City Stats,** or look at a city written up using it, and see a wall of descriptive terms and numbers. Some provide a good idea of what the burg is like – *if* you're running a game where the heroes, say, have Status and Wealth, or must capture or defend the place in a war. Others seem *almost* useful to **GURPS Action** . . . but not quite. Let's make like a mayor at election time and build some bridges!

> ### An Explosion of Information!
>
> **Action** is supposed to move quickly, which is why it simplifies existing rules more often than it coins new ones. Yet Chapter 1 offers so many categorizations, modifiers, numbers, etc. that using them all would make the game more complex. So, *don't do that!* Everything in this chapter is *highly optional.* The GM picks only the possibilities that improve the story – and these needn't be the same for each settlement in the campaign or adventure.

POPULATION

In **Action,** population rarely matters in its own right. Most of its effects manifest through *Search Modifier* (below). An important exception is when a villain threatens to unleash *WMD* (**GURPS Action 2: Exploits,** p. 29). Similar thinking applies to a non-villainous *Outbreak!* (**Exploits,** p. 40).

Military-grade nukes are likely to kill 10-25% of a sprawling metropolis, or 80%+ of a more densely packed one. The GM could fairly roll 1d×10 for this percentage, reducing it to 1d×5, 2d, or 1d for a *makeshift* device. Biological, chemical, and radiological ("dirty") attacks are less immediately deadly – consider bumping them down a category or two – but often as bad or worse over time.

Thus, population sets the upper limit on how many lives are in danger. This matters when the heroes' actions can prevent or, more interestingly, *divert* the catastrophe; 100% of 0 out in the middle of nowhere is an obvious win, but a mere 1% of New York City is still over 80,000 people, which is like 10% of San Francisco or 100% of a college town. Numbers can motivate the *players* by making the menace feel more real, forcing dramatic choices.

Search Modifier

This modifier (which might be extended, p. 5) can affect *many* rolls in **Exploits,** and not only for searches!

The larger the city – in population or in the more abstract sense of physical scale – the more likely, better, or worse lots of things become. Below are several examples to use "as is" or inspire others.

Reversed Search Modifier: Many of the examples flip the sign of the search modifier; e.g., -3 for population less than 100 becomes +3 for a roll where smaller is better, and +3 for population 100,000+ becomes -3 for one where larger is worse.

BAD (**Exploits,** pp. 4-5): If the search modifier is positive, the GM might reverse it to estimate BAD when facing that locale's gangs, police, etc. This could *add* to the BAD for opposition with more resources in a town (e.g., -2 in general, -5 in Big City). Such BAD affects henchman skill levels normally (in that example, skill 12 becomes skill 15 in Big City) – competent minions are easier to find in a population center! In a campaign where the heroes venture abroad as agents of an organization that projects power, the GM may apply the search bonus to Assistance Rolls (**GURPS Action 1: Heroes,** pp. 24-25) made at "home base." *Ignore* all of this advice in small places with negative search modifiers – small-town opponents never have "positive BAD" and smalltown employers never suffer AR penalties, because what they lack in resources they make up for by knowing their turf.

Chases (**Exploits,** pp. 31-35): When a chase tears through a packed mall or rush-hour traffic, apply the reversed search modifier to *everybody's* Chase Rolls. If *Collateral Damage* (**Exploits,** p. 35) occurs, use the *worse* of the reversed modifier or -(1d-1) when the quarry's wipeout causes the pursuer a penalty. If it's the *heroes* who wipe out, start the penalty to Assistance Rolls for endangering people at this level, too; e.g., in a city with search modifier +3, even the first wipeout in a crowd gives -3 for being reckless. *Don't* modify Hide rolls, though – the disruption of a chase draws enough attention to cancel any benefits from hiding in the masses!

Cover-Ups (**Exploits,** p. 26): The more people there are to blame, the easier to deflect said blame. Apply the search modifier to rolls for cover-ups where almost anybody could be guilty ("Crime boss stabbed in alleyway, pictures at 11!") – but *not* in "locked-room mysteries."

Finding Things: The search modifier does its usual job in **Action,** too! Apply it to all rolls to *find* anything there's more of in a bigger town – clients, gear, jobs, payphones, useful garbage, etc. However, reverse it when bad guys could've hidden something bad anywhere; it's harder to find a terrorist nuke in a city (-3) than in a hamlet (+3). This is likely to affect *The Job* (**Exploits,** p. 6), *Black Market* (**Exploits,** p. 6), *Dropping a Dime* (**Exploits,** p. 9), *Dumpster-Diving* (**Exploits,** p. 14), and *Detection* (**Exploits,** p. 29).

Hiding in the Crowd: The bigger the city, the crazier its crowds and traffic! Anywhere that isn't cordoned off – especially in open public spaces – the GM can apply the search modifier when getting lost in the multitudes (on foot or in a vehicle) would benefit the heroes, but reverse it when they're trying to *find* somebody, pick up a trail, spot a sniper on a rooftop, etc. This might affect *Man in the Crowd* (**Exploits,** p. 10), *Tailing* (**Exploits,** p. 10), *Trails* (**Exploits,** p. 12), *Hiding Your Face* (**Exploits,** p. 27), *Blend In* (**Exploits,** p. 27), and *Spotting Trouble* (**Exploits,** p. 28).

Information: Apply the search modifier to rolls to research anything *outside* the area, if it can't be found online. Libraries, newspapers, and pubs are great for *local* news and gossip everywhere, but bigger towns are more cosmopolitan and outward-looking. This could affect *Targets and Locations* (**Exploits,** p. 7), *Research* (**Exploits,** p. 14), and *Word on the Street* (**Exploits,** p. 15).

Lifts and Pulls (**Exploits,** p. 23): The GM may apply the search modifier whenever the heroes are trying to steal or swap something downtown, in a busy mall, etc. – though not at an office, the opera, or other place with restricted access. Reverse it when *they* are the targets, or are attempting to spot a thief!

Noise: In a bustling public space, apply the reversed search modifier to *Listening* (**Exploits,** p. 12) rolls made without tech like a laser or shotgun mike; this reflects noise level. Do the same for *Intercepts* (**Exploits,** p. 14) rolls targeting cell phones, computers, radios, or other wireless devices in a busy area; this simulates *electronic* noise level.

Public Speaking (**Exploits,** p. 15): When rabble-rousing to cause a riot, the GM may treat the crowd's Will as (13 - search modifier), minimum Will 10. It's *hard* to stir up a mob in a hamlet of 50 inhabitants (Will 16), easy in a city (Will 10) full of angry youths and fed-up commuters.

The Training Sequence (**Exploits,** p. 17): When the heroes aren't teaching a specific group but rather whoever they can round up, the search modifier affects the roll – a stand-in for its usual role when hiring.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

A city's landscape, architecture, and infrastructure most often serve to meet "Suitable scenery or Lucky Break" conditions for chase maneuvers; see **Exploits,** p. 32. A maze of alleyways and dead ends might enable a Hide or Stunt Escape maneuver. A river or canal cutting across town – or a subway system – can justify a Mobility Escape or Mobility Pursuit. Pay attention to the city's description and notes for ideas . . . or *add* inspiring notes (p. 11).

The *stats* describing the physical environment sometimes matter, too.

Terrain

The terrain type the city is built on affects a few things directly:

● The **Survival** (pp. B223-224) specialty required *outside* the city (always use **Urban Survival** *inside*).

This becomes important when heroes or bad guys get chased out – or try to sneak in!

● Move when *Hoofing It* (**Exploits,** p. 8), if the heroes go off-road around or even *in* town.

● Penalties to **Tracking** (p. B226) for *Trails* (**Exploits,** p. 12).

Terrain also offers openings for exploits and dangers. Nature doesn't always stop at the city limits!

Arctic: Prime terrain for *Skidding* (**Exploits,** p. 19) – and actual **Skiing,** when making Chase Rolls (**Exploits,** p. 34).

Desert and Plains: Relatively flat and unremarkable, meaning chases and sniping can easily go to Extreme range (**Exploits,** p. 31).

Island/Beach: Boats and divers (**Exploits,** p. 18), *Underwater Shooting* (**Exploits,** p. 39), and **Boating** and **Swimming** for Chase Rolls are more likely to matter. *Disposing of Corpses* (**Exploits,** p. 26) becomes simpler. Expect nautical dangers (**GURPS Action 5: Dictionary of Danger,** pp. 23-24). With rivers or canals, these things are true in *any* terrain.

Jungle: Camouflage (**Exploits,** p. 9), *Camouflaged Positions* (**Exploits,** p. 28), and action starting at Close range become commonplace. Dangerous plants (**Dictionary of Danger,** p. 8) and animals (**Dictionary of Danger,** pp. 41-42) can creep into town.

Mountain: Climbing (**Exploits,** pp. 18-19) can be crucial even in town – say, to reach the villain's chalet overlooking the city center. Mining equipment (**Dictionary of Danger,** pp. 29-30) is likely to be parked or passing through.

EXTENDED SEARCH MODIFIER

The maximum search modifier on **City Stats,** p. 5 is +3, for 100,000+ people. Although even larger settlements *do* have more to offer, it's best to treat each borough, *arrondissement,* or – for metropolises and megalopolises – satellite or major neighborhood as its own "city." Repeated rolls at +3 are possible, the cost being the time (and possibly carfare) to get across town.

Still, as dice-rolling several times for a single task is antithetical to **Action,** the GM may prefer one roll at an enhanced bonus. Most generously, continue the table's progression: +4 at 500,000, +5 at 1,000,000, +6 at 5,000,000, and +7 at 10,000,000+ people (no real-world city has yet reached the 50,000,000 souls needed for +8).

This gets excessive for many of the uses proposed in *Search Modifier* (pp. 4-5). As an alternative, assess +1 rather than +2 per factor of 10 past 100,000. That's +4 at 1,000,000 or +5 at 10,000,000+ people.

Extended modifiers can be flipped and read as penalties, as usual; e.g., a city large enough to give +5 to searches gives -5 where bigger is worse or harder.

It's generally best to cap the modifier at +3 (-3, if reversed) when it represents *localized* mob size or population *density,* as it does for chases, cover-ups, getting away with theft, hiding in the crowd, noise, and rabble-rousing. Save extended bonuses for tasks that represent true *searches* of an entire, vast urban center for specific people, things, or information – or for BAD abstracting everything local opponents can bring to bear.

Swampland: Prime territory for disposing of corpses – and for gators and snakes.

Woodlands: Enables camouflage and close-range action, like jungle. Large logging trucks (***Dictionary of Danger,*** pp. 28-29) are common sights. Bears, mountain lions, and wolves may stray into town.

Appearance

It's hard to imagine this mattering in a superficially "realistic" ***Action*** game. But in a noir-inspired, moralistic campaign, the -1 for an Unattractive city, -2 for an Ugly one, or -4 for a Hideous one might establish BAD there. Perhaps the villains made it horrible; maybe the busted streetlights, smog, oppressive architecture, and lack of nosy public-works personnel keeping everything clean attracted the bad guys. In the latter case, it would be reasonable to reverse the penalty into a *bonus* when heroes use **Stealth** in those gloomy, deserted streets and alleyways.

Pretty places, on the other hand, draw tourists, so *Commercial Travel* (***Exploits,*** p. 8) to them is almost always more available (though rarely cheaper!). The GM might apply the +1 for Attractive, +3 for Beautiful, or +4 for Very Beautiful to rolls to obtain such transportation.

Hygiene

As *Biohazard?* (***Dictionary of Danger,*** p. 40) states, disease and infection are largely out-of-genre for ***Action,*** so this modifier is unlikely to see routine use. The GM is free to ignore it and move on.

A possible exception is during an *Outbreak!* (***Exploits,*** p. 40). Disease is more likely to strike or gain purchase in a sickly, swampy, unhealthy place with a Hygiene penalty. The GM might simply choose a city like this for a hot-zone adventure, but it would be valid to apply the Hygiene modifier to **Hazardous Materials (Biological)** and **NBC Suit** rolls to avoid being exposed, and to **Physician** rolls to treat the sick, in *any* town.

Hygiene – positive or negative – could also apply to the **HT** rolls to resist anything in *Y Is for Yuck* (***Dictionary of Danger,*** pp. 40-41), notably affliction and "generic" illness. Clean cities have relatively tame bad stuff, for a bonus; filthy ones have godawful poison everywhere, for a penalty.

MAGICAL ENVIRONMENT

Magic is *totally* out-of-idiom for ***Action*** – to the point where ***Exploits,*** p. 44 calls it out among the top things to avoid. Still, the GM with ***GURPS Action 8: Twists*** might want a change of pace (if so, ***GURPS Thaumatology: Urban Magics*** is also on-topic).

Mana Level

City Stats gives Athens and San Francisco no mana; *Pyramid #3/117: Hot Spots* does the same for Paris, Berlin, and Havana. This is one way to explain the lack of identifiable magic in our world. When assigning mana (or sanctity) to real-world or made-up cities in a standard ***Action*** game, "none" is the simplest option.

If magic is to show up as a twist, its apparent absence in the world must be due not to the absence of *mana,* but to a dearth of belief and training in *magic.* For a one-and-done change of pace, high or even very high mana causes the most amusing havoc – if the PCs can't exploit it, who cares? If magic will stick around, low mana is best if the GM wants to discourage the heroes from becoming wizards, normal mana otherwise.

In a globetrotting campaign, grand old towns with a reputation for the supernatural – Giza, Lhasa, New Orleans, et al. – may have low or even normal mana, but most of the world might have none.

Enchantment Level

Even where there *is* mana, "no enchantment" works best for ***Action,*** rising *perhaps* to "rare enchantment." Magic-items markets and professional enchanters won't fit, even as twists.

> *There are cities that get by on their good looks, offer climate and scenery, views of mountains or oceans, rockbound or with palm trees; and there are cities that have to work for a living.*
>
> – Elmore Leonard

CULTURE

The rules for cultural traits work normally in ***Action,*** meaning these stats do, too. Here are some pointers on when they're likely to matter.

Language

Since only the face man and investigator have languages on their templates, the GM must take care not to make the campaign boring for everyone else by having all the parts involving conversation or text exclude the heroes who can't function in the local tongue. When's the last time James Bond *needed* to speak, say, Chinese in Beijing or Russian in Moscow? And the language of the campaign's "home base" should *always* be one that the whole team understands, natively or otherwise.

Still, globetrotting secret agents and mercs are likely to end up where they don't speak the language. In that situation, *many* common ***Action*** tasks suffer -3 for Broken or -1 for Accented comprehension (p. B24), unless the heroes engineer ways not to converse, read, or write; have a translator; or invoke **Serendipity** to find the one Laotian in the village who speaks English. The affected feats are simply impossible with *no* comprehension!

Relevant tasks include:

● Any reading or asking around for information – *Targets and Locations* (***Exploits,*** p. 7), *Research* (***Exploits,*** p. 14), etc. – using local resources.

● All feats of *Social Engineering* (***Exploits,*** pp. 15-17) and *Psy-Ops* (***Exploits,*** p. 27) that aren't entirely nonverbal and nontextual.

● *The Training Sequence* (***Exploits,*** p. 17), when the heroes are teaching people who speak another language.

- *Falsifying Records* (**Exploits,** p. 26) in another language.
- *Impersonation* (**Exploits,** p. 27) – not only if the impersonator must speak, but also if they have to interact naturally with signs, controls, or readouts another language.
- Any other task involving an Influence skill (**Diplomacy, Fast-Talk, Intimidation, Savoir-Faire, Sex Appeal, Streetwise,** or another skill standing in) or mind games with **Brainwashing, Interrogation, Propaganda,** or **Psychology.**

Technological tasks – notably many of those under *Gathering Intelligence* (**Exploits,** pp. 11-14) – are unaffected, as long as the heroes have computers and such that operate in a language they understand. Comprehending any information collected *is* affected.

Literacy

With a global literacy rate of 86% and rising in today's world, and *urban* literacy at 90%+ almost everywhere, it's simplest to treat the typical city's Literacy stat as Native. However, commandos, mercs, and spies sometimes visit developing regions. Treat a real-world literacy rate of 0-25% as a Literacy stat of None, 26-50% as Broken, and 51-86% as Accented.

The downside of low Literacy is that even if the team knows the language, they can't rely on the availability of written materials, as fewer locals use them. In a city with None or Broken, rolls for *Targets and Locations* (**Exploits,** p. 7), *Dumpster-Diving* (**Exploits,** p. 14), *Files and Records* (**Exploits,** p. 14), etc. are at -3, regardless of the *researcher's* literacy; in a town with Accented, these rolls are at -1. These penalties also affect rolls for *Finding a Client* (**Exploits,** p. 6), *The Training Sequence* (**Exploits,** p. 17), *Cover-Ups* (**Exploits,** p. 26), *Psy-Ops* (**Exploits,** p. 27), and similar applications of **Propaganda, Teaching,** or **Writing** to use leaflets, SMS messages, textbooks, written articles, or similar to reach, instruct, or deceive groups of typical citizens.

The upside of low Literacy for visitors who can't read the local language is that many *natives* can't read, either, so lots of things that usually bear writing – controls, readouts, signs, tickets, etc. – sport intuitive icons and pictograms. These let foreigners avoid the difficulties in *Language* (pp. 6-7) when they must *read* but not write or converse. Assume that's the case if Literacy is None or Broken; Accented or Native mean fewer such aids, so the problem goes away on 12 or less or 9 or less, respectively, on 3d.

That said, if there's any doubt as to whether a particular, important, *named* NPC can read and write, consult their character sheet – don't leave it to generic stats! Literacy of None, Broken, or Accented means that the man (and sadly more likely, *woman*) on the street is less capable. Educated types – politicians, professors, scientists, etc. – normally have Native literacy, and neither the downsides nor the upsides above apply when dealing with such individuals.

Tech Level

Per **Heroes,** p. 26, **Action** is TL8. Communities in the developing world might include more TL6 or TL7 in "the mix of TL6-8 hardware seen in movies" mentioned on **Exploits,** p. 44 – but as that passage goes on to say, the heroes' skills are tailored to match, so there are never penalties for using such gear.

If the GM opts to treat a Struggling town as TL7 or a Poor one as TL6 (see *Wealth,* below), that doesn't mean time stops at the city limits! Still, it would be fair to penalize rolls to obtain advanced equipment – it has to come from outside, with all the fuss that implies. Go with -1 for a one-TL difference or -3 for a two-TL difference. This most often affects rolls for *Assembling Kit* (**Exploits,** pp. 6-7).

As reiterated above, these penalties don't apply when using lower-tech equipment, but dated *infrastructure* is famously less reliable. To reflect this, apply -1 in a nominally TL7 city or -3 in a TL6 one if relying solely on local networks for *Communications* (**Exploits,** pp. 8-9), *Hacking* (**Exploits,** p. 13), *Intercepts* (**Exploits,** p. 14), etc. But *The Cell Phone Problem* (**Exploits,** p. 9) remains even in places where the working TL is below that of cell phones – if anything, these devices are *more* prevalent in developing countries!

For similar reasons, the GM might turn these penalties into *bonuses* for heroes trying to defeat smart fences (**Exploits,** p. 20), *Electronic Locks* (**Exploits,** p. 20), or *Security Systems* (**Exploits,** pp. 21-22), or sidestep checkpoint or electronic security (**Exploits,** pp. 29-30). If the city is rated as TL7 or TL6, heroes with full-on TL8 gear get +1 or +3, respectively, to deal with "generic" electronic security measures there, though those that are part of the plot might inflict BAD instead.

You go up the stairs, I'll take the elevator. For once it's not broken.
*– Tony, in **Banlieue 13** (2004)*

ECONOMY

Despite not caring much about Wealth and Status, **Action** specifies a few tasks that a settlement's socioeconomic realities could affect.

Wealth

While the Wealth level of *heroes* mostly doesn't matter (**Heroes,** p. 27), that of *cities* does, in two main ways:

Bribery (**Exploits,** p. 15): Anyone worth bribing in a burg has minimum Wealth equal to their city's. For instance, a Poor city has many Poor inhabitants bribable for 1/5 of the usual amount, while in a Comfortable one, effective bribes are *at least* double. Ignore this for *named* NPCs who are part of the adventure and have specified Wealth levels – it's for "generic citizens," like random cops or officials.

Finding a Client (**Exploits,** p. 6): When freelancers go without work, the $500/week docked from their $2,000/month pocket-money allowance incorporates costs that income is usually assumed to cover. The weekly withholding is $100 when staying in a Poor city or $250 in a Struggling one – savings go further – but *$1,000* in a Comfortable one (the team had better find work within two weeks!). Wealthy places are rare, outside of resort or casino towns, but assume the heroes lose $2,000 and run out of cash after a week. As for BAD, that gets one step worse per week, regardless of Wealth.

This makes it tempting for heroes to "slum it" in places where the living is cheap (and so are the officials) – and that's fine. Action films are full of mercs living large in places where dollars go far. The catch? Local freelance jobs pay less: 1/2 normal in a Struggling town, or 1/5 normal in a Poor one. Outside work may pay better, but first the squad has to get there, often at their expense; see *Commercial Travel* (**Exploits,** p. 8). Jobs in wealthier places may or may not pay *better* than average, at the GM's whim.

The above tacitly assumes freelancers, like mercenaries and traveling thieves. Heroes who work for an organization are salaried and don't care about finding work or what the payoff is. However, *their employers* engage bean-counters who assume that it costs less to operate in low-Wealth cities. Though they can't pay employees less, they can and do divide the disbursals under *Cash* (**Heroes,** p. 24) by two or five for a Struggling or Poor destination, respectively – but bosses who care about mission success also double cash assistance in a Comfortable place.

None of this affects equipment costs or budgets! However, the GM could fairly rule that Wealth influences the *availability* of up-to-date gear: People in Struggling areas still rely on many TL7 items, and those in Poor regions sometimes keep TL6 ones running.

Status

Status usually matters even less than Wealth. Still, as it's a range that covers *everyone* living in a city, it can on rare occasions establish cutoffs for class-sensitive social skills:

Streetwise: This skill is for dealing with street-level crime. In the incredibly rare few cities where the *lowest* Status is greater than 0, "crime" means dishonest officials, greedy corporations, and rich mobsters – there are no street gangs and shady guys on corners, who would be Status -1 or 0. Switch all social tasks that specify Streetwise to **Savoir-Faire (Mafia)** when dealing with professional criminals. For unprincipled people who aren't mobsters, replace Streetwise with **Administration** for corrupt officials, **Merchant** for unethical corporate types, or **Savoir-Faire (Police)** for dirty cops – or with **Savoir-Faire (High Society)** for anyone with Status 2+, irrespective of all this. This most notably affects *Opportunity Knocks* (**Exploits,** p. 6), *Black Market* (**Exploits,** p. 6), illegal *Bribery* (**Exploits,** p. 15), *Word on the Street* (**Exploits,** p. 15), *Fitting In* (**Exploits,** p. 16), and fencing stolen goods *After Action* (**Exploits,** p. 47).

Savoir-Faire (High Society): If a community's *highest* Status is less than 2 – which is plausible in mining and logging camps, farming villages, etc. – this skill isn't useful. Notably, it's worthless for *Manipulation* (**Exploits,** p. 15), *Fitting In,* and trying to *Blend In* (**Exploits,** p. 27) at high-society events . . . because there's no high society to gadfly about in! There are people in charge, but they're going to respond to **Administration** if ununiformed officials, **Savoir-Faire (Military or Police)** if uniformed ones,

Merchant if businesspeople, or **Savoir-Faire (Mafia)** if *crooked* businesspeople.

Both conditions can apply! A weirdly egalitarian city of Status 1 individuals consists entirely of respected professionals and functionaries who might be dishonest, but aren't street scum, and who may be important, but aren't socialites.

All of the above assumes dealing with residents. Street-level crooks and rich glitterati (or actual royalty!) visiting at the same time as the heroes react to Streetwise and Savoir-Faire (High Society) as usual.

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

This can be both irrelevant and supremely important, because although action heroes rarely *interact* with governments, many *serve* one (as intelligence, law-enforcement, military, or security officers) – and those who don't must watch out for NPCs who do!

Government

Government type influences the kinds of adventures that take place in the city and the types of campaigns likely to be set there, and also suggests *Control Rating* (p. 10). Below are some interesting examples, chosen primarily because – unlike genuine technocracies, machine civilizations, hive minds, and utopias – they verifiably exist in the real world, where **Action** nominally happens.

Carter: This ain't no democracy.
Lee: Yes, it is.
Carter: No, it ain't. This is the United States of James Carter.
I'm the president, I'm the emperor, I'm the king.

*– **Rush Hour** (1998)*

Society Types

Anarchy: This is nearly always a *temporary* state caused by violent conflict. A city in anarchy is perfect for adventures involving mercs working for one of the many sides – or commandos or vigilantes attempting to end the chaos. It's big enough to let players have fun with heavy weapons, yet small enough to leave when it gets old or order is restored.

Corporate State: **Action** lacks sci-fi corporations that truly *make* the law and *own* their staff, but it has "company towns," in the form of remote villages built by railways or resource-extraction companies (drilling, logging, mining, etc.), and single-employer communities serving factories. Whoever runs the business runs the town – and they aren't usually the good guys.

Dictatorship: Most "bad guy" countries in action cinema are dictatorships, and so are their cities. This is fertile ground for clandestine ops by spies and commandos! Working *for* The Man as police or security officers puts gamers in the uncomfortable position of playing "jackbooted thugs" – unless they rebel, which is straight-up heroic action fare.

Representative Democracy: This is tacitly assumed for most "good guy" countries – and hence their cities – in action fiction. The PCs can proudly serve the government by fighting crime, foreign spies, or murderous terrorists. Such destinations *also* offer people the freedoms to assemble, own equipment, and amass wealth that enable classic caper stories!

Theocracy: "Bad guy" countries that aren't secular dictatorships tend to be religious ones. They work the same way, but it's important to be respectful – be sure to distinguish the faith from its worst excesses, and the faithful from their iron-fisted rulers (who often aren't devout!).

Special Situations

Bureaucracy: Action stories like to portray bureaucracies as conspiratorial. Cities with endless departments and forgotten annexes are perfect for spy thrillers, and for intricate social engineering by face men. Such a place is also the ideal home base for a task force campaign (**Heroes,** p. 6) – because *of course* there are "ultra-black organizations."

Charismatic Rule: Supernatural figures don't suit **Action,** but if face men can buy up to Charisma 6, so might NPCs. This best suits cult compounds, which are as likely to be dictatorships as theocracies. It also fits one-horse towns run forever by a popular big man. The former are usually villainous and in need of intervention by law officers; the latter are merely cautious and conservative, unless they deal in blood diamonds or the like.

Military Government: This can be layered with representative democracy to represent a city "liberated" from bad guys – a place for heroic soldiers with heavy weapons to fight terrorists and pockets of resistance, minus the excessive free-for-all of anarchy. But it's more often used with dictatorship to create a nest of evil conquerors who need blowing up.

Oligarchy: This tends to be attached to a society type when the story needs a group of highly placed gangsters to take down. At the city level, it means the burg is home to a pack of unpleasant councilors who run their wards or boroughs like gang turf.

Sanctuary: Hives of scum and villainy are borderline-unrealistic, but there *are* places that refuse to extradite, and the GM could invoke cinematic license to go a step beyond. The heroes are likely law enforcers or contractors who carry out undercover renditions or assassinations – but they *might* be natives doing someone's plausibly deniable dirty work.

Socialist: Old-timey Cold War stories slap this onto "commie" cities. It almost always goes with dictatorship, with one explaining the other; which one explains the other is left vague. It's one of the defining features of the East in East vs. West spy stories.

Relationships to Other Political Entities

Few modern-day cities are city-states: Monaco is famous for casinos, which in **Action** attract spies. Singapore is famous for authoritarianism, which in **Action** means missions to smuggle people or things in or out. Vatican City is famous for the pope, who in **Action** apparently has all kinds of secret agents. All make great locations for sneaky adventures!

More widespread are what **GURPS** calls "free cities." *Special economic zones* (like Xiamen) aren't subject to the usual rules for business and trade, and thus are perfect for adventures featuring crime or corporate espionage. *Special administrative regions* (like Hong Kong) enjoy significant political autonomy; though not city-states, they have much the same appeal, and often tightly focused police and security services to work for or against. *Capital districts* (like Washington, DC) exist independently of their nation's other regions (cantons, provinces, states, etc.); most are home to endless agencies and agents in the intelligence, law enforcement, and security realms, and choice targets for spies and terrorists.

The vast majority of modern cities are municipalities, which share all the properties of their surrounding regions and nations, but with an extra level of government – in theory to make running the place easier, in practice often degenerating into bureaucracy or oligarchy. This leads to jurisdictional vagueness that seeds crime and capers, and also to vigilantes who feel the municipal government isn't effectively enforcing the law of the land.

Subjugated cities are mostly a special case of military government in the real world – splitting this hair in **Action** isn't worth the effort.

Control Rating

In theory, CR dictates what gear adventurers can carry without breaking the law, and what exploits they can get away with. In practice, as *Exploits,* p. 44 warns, *enforcing* CR goes against the spirit of cinematic action, where illicit spy gadgets, deadly weapons, and car chases are genre conventions. Assume that if the heroes are fighting the good fight, the authorities look the other way.

Thus, as that advice also recommends, CR is relegated to the role of "big stick": If the nominal good guys aren't being very good, *let them have it.* Then, a high-CR city is a far worse place to be. For irresponsible actions, interpret -CR as a penalty similar to that for causing *Collateral Damage* (*Exploits,* p. 35): For freelancers, *extra* BAD caused by the interference of the authorities; for legitimate agents, a penalty to Assistance Rolls. Mere possession of illegal gear might cause only -CR+LC, so an antitank rocket (LC1) is just a permit violation in a CR2 town (-2 + 1 = -1), but cause for serious concern in a peaceful CR4 city (-4 + 1 = -3).

Still, sometimes a reason to sneak around is useful to have. In a caper, spy, vigilante, or similar campaign – or in *any* game, if the PCs are agents visiting a city where they have no legal authority – ill-advised deeds and equipment cause extra BAD as above at all times. This gives rambunctious players a practical reason not to break out sniper rifles and explosives on adventures about getting in and out without leaving a trace . . .

Corruption

Instead of treating this as a penalty to CR, reverse it and read it as a *bonus* to shady doings in town – most obviously rolls tied to *Bribery* (*Exploits,* p. 15), but also those for *Opportunity Knocks* (*Exploits,* p. 6) to seek illicit jobs, *Black Market* (*Exploits,* p. 6) to find illicit gear, *Anything to Declare, Sir?* (*Exploits,* p. 8) to slip such gear into town (and *Smuggling,* *Exploits,* p. 27 to get it out), *Word on the Street* (*Exploits,* p. 15), *Cover-Ups* (*Exploits,* p. 26), and perhaps even *Escaping Prisons* (*Exploits,* p. 42) if the guards make things easy. Most real-world cities have Corruption -1, so this makes urban centers better places to act like a criminal (+1 to all of the above) – exactly as in reality and action flicks! It's rare for a *stable* place to have worse Corruption, but certainly not impossible.

To balance out a constant bonus to many tasks popular with action heroes, it would be fair *also* to use Corruption as BAD when facing even "generic" criminals in town, and

to add it to the BAD posed by crooks specific to the adventure. Thus, a truly rotten burg with Corruption -3 might be wonderful place to bribe cops, score guns, and find work as a contract killer (+3), but get *scary* if the PCs antagonize the local mob (-3).

MILITARY CAPABILITIES

The problem with these stats is that they assume cities have standing military forces, which is a little strange for those that aren't, say, Singapore. It's fair to *ignore* them in *Action.* The determined GM can keep reading for suggested ways to interpret them.

Military Resources

Optionally, interpret MR as how much the city spends each month on *armed* police, security for municipal buildings, guards for local correctional facilities, etc. Rather than define these using *GURPS Mass Combat,* compare MR to the $2,000 monthly allowance on *Heroes,* p. 27 to estimate the city's value as a Patron (p. B72) if the heroes work for it; round up *or* down, whichever feels right for the adventure or campaign. As *Action* prefers Rank to Patron, either have Assistance Rolls produce aid consistent with such a Patron, or use *GURPS Social Engineering: Pulling Rank* to "convert."

Should the team work *against* the city's finest, add 5 points to Patron value and flip the sign to estimate Enemy value. This needn't be adjusted to one of the standard costs; -15 and -25 points are acceptable. As usual, BAD is Enemy point value divided by 4, dropping fractions (*Exploits,* p. 4).

Most cities count as 15- or 20-point Patrons – or 25-point Patrons, if city-states. This makes them -20-, -25-, or -30-point Enemies, giving BAD -5, -6, or -7.

For instance, *City Stats,* p. 18 gives San Francisco an MR of $21 million. That's about 1/3 of its *actual* law-enforcement budget – a realistic "tooth-to-tail" ratio. It's also 10,500 times what the heroes get to spend, giving a 15-point Patron (consistent with "a big city police department" on p. B72). That's a -20-point Enemy (consistent with "a city police department" on p. B135), presenting BAD -5.

Defense Bonus

Outside of an adventure about military PCs attacking or defending a settlement (which *could* arise if using *GURPS Action 7: Mercenaries*), the "traditional" interpretation of this stat is even less likely to matter than that of MR. On the other hand, cities accessible only via a few easily watched bridges, mountain passes, or tunnels are tricky to enter undetected – and communities with genuine fortifications have staffed gates and checkpoints.

At the GM's whim, if the heroes can't visit a city freely – for whatever reason – divide DB by 2, drop fractions, and read the result as the penalty to rolls to cross city limits with *Anything to Declare, Sir?* (*Exploits,* p. 8), *Insertion* (*Exploits,* p. 18), or *Smuggling* (*Exploits,* p. 27); to circumvent any *Surveillance and Patrols* (*Exploits,* p. 18), *Fences* (*Exploits,* p. 20), *Security Systems* (*Exploits,* pp. 21-22), or checkpoint or electronic security (*Exploits,* pp. 29-30) at the border; and for *Destruction* (*Exploits,* pp. 24-25) targeting these defenses.

If the PCs are specifically on a watch list or the place is on high alert, base the penalty on *full* DB. The GM can treat this as BAD, especially for skill levels for NPC guards. This kludge works for security at sensitive municipal facilities, too, notably prisons (which would affect *Escaping Prisons,* **Exploits,** p. 42). Most modern cities have at least DB +4, for BAD -2 (or skill 12) against casual attempts or -4 (or skill 14) if alerted.

However, BAD from DB is seldom cumulative with BAD from *Military Resources* (p. 10). In most cases, the more severe of the two applies; see *Too BAD?* (below) for why. For instance, the -5 for San Francisco's cops is worse than the -2 against routine illegal entry *and* the -4 when on the lookout that DB +4 implies, so BAD is -5 and Frisco's security personnel use skill 15.

NOTES

Many "standard" **City Stats** notes mention stats variations that are likely to matter in **Action.** For example:

● Exceptions to *Search Modifier* (pp. 4-5) for particular industries or functions. These often correspond closely to specific interpretations **The City** proposes – especially those related to finding *things* and *information.*

● Languages that are worth knowing besides those listed in *Language* (pp. 6-7).

● Reduced *Tech Level* (p. 7) – or *exceptions* to depressed TL – for key technologies important to action heroes. Special-case *high* TL can suggest cutting-edge MacGuffins (**Exploits,** p. 44), and *Q Is for Quantum* (**Dictionary of Danger,** pp. 27-28) and *Things Just Got Weird* (**Twists,** pp. 6-8) situations.

● Adjusted *Control Rating* (p. 10) that applies to specific deeds or gear significant to **Action:** vigilantism, speeding, guns, burglary equipment, etc.

Any game-mechanical effects **The City** suggests for a stat use the special-case value of that stat when the GM feels that the team or the *adventure* has strayed into one of the exceptions.

Indeed, **The City** mentions *lots* of game-mechanical effects, and the GM might want to note a few explicitly.

Most numerous are all the modifiers to specific **Action** tasks that follow from data in **City Stats** but that aren't discussed there – or that go outside the usual range, like *Extended Search Modifier* (p. 5). A summary of local sources of BAD, and when they apply, is particularly valuable; see *Too BAD?* (below). Yet not everything is a modifier, including:

● The percentage of *Population* (see p. 4) living in the city core and likely to be affected by a terrorist nuke.

● *Physical Environment* (see p. 5) that could affect chase maneuvers, especially transport infrastructure like canals, piers, and elevated rail, landscape such as steep hills or a lake, or a surfeit of bollards or speed bumps – and also the *absence* of "classic" action-movie features that players sometimes assume, like alleyways (hardly universal), lampposts (the wires are underground), and street vendors (if forbidden by city ordinances). There are also aspects that could affect some *Climbing* (**Exploits,** pp. 18-19) and *Parkour* (**Exploits,** pp. 19-20) tasks; e.g., closely packed buildings, with accessible roofs and ubiquitous clotheslines and TV antennas. In this vein, distances for *Falls* (**Exploits,** p. 19) from typical buildings or local cliffs are handy.

● Special dangers associated with *Terrain* (pp. 5-6).

● Whether *Appearance* (p. 5) is more than cosmetic, and how.

● Whether low *Literacy* (p. 7) leads to convenient signage.

● What kinds of classic action plots *Government* (pp. 8-9) supports and *doesn't* support.

● The city's effectiveness as a Patron or Enemy; see *Military Resources* (p. 10).

Finally, there are notes unrelated to stats that become particularly important in **Action.** For instance, if a place has no cellular network, that doesn't have to be tied to TL, but it *does* mean that *The Cell Phone Problem* (**Exploits,** p. 9) doesn't exist there! And a list of important NPCs, including Patrons and Enemies that *aren't* the city or its officers, can be handy.

When creating cities specifically for **Action,** or adapting existing ones for the purpose, note as much of the above detail as possible. Trying to go through **The City** and ferret it out in play will only spoil the action!

Too BAD?

Many city stats have the potential to inflict BAD. For instance, *Search Modifier* (pp. 4-5) can augment it for size, negative *Appearance* (p. 5) can make it worse to conform to genre stereotypes, *Control Rating* (p. 10) can elevate it if the heroes get villainous, and *Corruption* (p. 10), *Military Resources* (p. 19), and *Defense Bonus* (pp. 10-11) can contribute to it when facing the city's criminals, authorities, or defenses.

Are these cumulative? That's depends . . .

On one hand, adding up all this BAD can get ridiculous. It can render a typical city more difficult to adventure in than the Secret Island Base of Dr. Unpleasant. Normally, it's best to pick either the *worst* applicable BAD or the one that *best fits the specific situation,* and use only that.

On the other hand, if the adventure sees the PCs butting heads with an entire community . . . well, things *should* be tough. Being on the bad side of everyone from street gangs to the mayor in an authoritarian city of millions whose taxes fund heavy security is *not* a healthy situation. In that case, BAD might quite fairly plummet to -10, -15, or worse as the PCs blow things up, become Public Enemy No. 1, and draw both a manhunt and a reward large enough to tempt even senior citizens to have a go. Starting at the most modest BAD and gradually adding the rest works best; see *From BAD to Worse* (**Exploits,** p. 4).

Similar logic applies whenever two or more stats would logically penalize a dice roll: Choose the *most appropriate* penalty where that's obvious or the *worst* one where it isn't, and use modifiers cumulatively only where it's clear that they're all "appropriate" – probably because the heroes straight-up made a mess.

GOTTA GET TO . . .

These days, if the GM wants to use a real-world city, there's little that a page or two in a *GURPS* book – or even a whole supplement – could offer that the Internet couldn't. For instance, Google lets you find detailed maps and zoom to street level to see images of the buildings, while Wikipedia provides more than enough information about neighborhoods, climate, crime, etc. for *GURPS Action.* Descriptions and stats for such a location stand a strong risk of clashing with the players' interpretations of the place in real life, especially if they've been there or *lived* there.

For these and other reasons, the GM may want a place that players can't look up – or one that's designed and fine-tuned for an *Action* game. What follows are some ready-to-use examples, each with these details:

● *GURPS City Stats* data in a box.
● *Action Items,* which calls out *especially* fitting options from Chapter 1. The GM is free to "switch on" others, but this subset captures the location's flavor.
● *In Action,* which offers "seeds" for using the settlement in an adventure – or even as a campaign setting!

Oh, and before we board the plane: Action flicks are often shot in multiple locations that offer essential elements for key scenes; e.g., a Chinatown for the foot chase, hills for the car chase, and a port for the smuggler shootout. Architecture, topography, vegetation, languages on signs, the livery of city buses, etc. vary inconsistently in the background if they aren't central to the thrills. *These* places are no different – reality-check them at your peril!

CAMP 23

Camp 23 is a remote logging facility – a "company town" where distance accords the unionized locals (who don't take kindly to strangers) the leverage to deal with the owner (integrated wood-products behemoth Western Timber) on fairly even ground. It *is* what it seems to be. However, it's *also* a place where people could disappear ("Bears got him."), and where environmental crime would be easy to cover up.

Action Items

Population: Camp 23 is *tiny* – any serious WMD (or powerful conventional bomb) would erase it from the map. Apply its search modifier of -2 to attempts to hide anywhere but in the forest, but give acoustic or electronic listening attempts +2, except near running equipment. Groups of gruff, rugged lumberjacks resist rabble-rousing with Will 15.

Physical Environment: **Survival (Woodlands)** is *highly* recommended for visitors, as the "town" is basically a clearing in an enormous forest. Move is halved in the woods, but **Tracking** is unpenalized. Dangers include bears, cougars, wolves, falling trees, all kinds of logging machinery, and the occasional stray bullet from a hunter's rifle.

Magical Environment: If the GM wants to get weird, a small, remote, easily contained place works best – just raise the mana level. There are plenty of indigenous legends about frightening spirits in the region.

Culture: As in most U.S. communities, people here understand English, can read and write, and have TL8 equipment. No special rules are needed.

Economy: Camp 23's flat Status profile makes Savoir-Faire (High Society) irrelevant. Western Timber employees respond to **Administration;** rougher workers (mostly Status -1), to **Streetwise.** Wealth rarely figures into anything either way.

Political Environment: Most adventures in Camp 23 involve the bidding of Western Timber or the will of charismatic union boss Fraser Pfeifer. Western is implicated in unethical environmental and business practices; Pfeifer, in overreaching his mandate to persuade residents to do things, some of them illegal. As the camp is privately held, state and federal authorities don't often intervene. This is a place where CR should rarely matter – no matter what visitors do, the home team is no more pleasant, so it's the Wild (North) West, baby! *Definitely* flip Corruption around and give +1 to rolls to cut deals with Western or Pfeifer, but also use BAD -1 for even the most generic lumberjacks.

Military Capabilities: Military Resources suggest that Camp 23 would barely count as a Patron (it's a logging camp!), though Fraser Pfeifer *might* rate 10 points. This implies a -15-point Enemy, which is more severe than a single foe equal to a PC; assume that's Pfeifer and some union men or Western security guards. They'd collectively rate BAD -3. *Ignore* DB normally – but if Camp 23 knows meddlesome visitors are on their way, read it as -4 to rolls to infiltrate along the sole road into town or through wilderness the locals know inside and out.

Other Notes: Camp 23 lacks landlines and cellular service. Communication with the outside world requires either a base-station radio ($15,000, 100 lbs., external power) or a satellite phone (**GURPS Action 1: Heroes,** p. 28). Internet access is dodgy on either: -2 to rolls for tasks that require it. *Cutting Power* (**GURPS Action 2: Exploits,** p. 25) at the camp's generators – or destroying them – would darken the whole site. *Logging* (**GURPS Action 5: Dictionary of Danger,** pp. 28-29) is practically required reading!

In Action

Eco-Criminals vs. Ecoterrorists. Western Timber is tearing up the forests – or perhaps its *logging* is by the book but it's dumping industrial waste in the back of beyond. Word got out, and now the authorities are investigating and activists are protesting. The heroes might be investigators, law officers caught between loggers and protestors, or additional security from head office. This far from civilization, things *will* get uncivilized.

Pine-Scented Cleaner. Camp 23 is the sort of place where someone could disappear, chewed up by machines or wild animals, or simply *lost.* If that someone is important to the plot, the PCs could wind up here – or they might come looking to dispose of corpses! Either way, the locals object to interference with their work; they're on the clock, after all. Unless, of course, they're involved, in which case *more* bodies may disappear.

Strikebreakers. Industrial relations between Western and the union have soured, and many hours down a long forest road with no witnesses around, the company has resorted to old-timey strikebreaking. The heroes might be hired as thugs by *either* side – or sent in by the authorities to put a halt to things, only to be cut off and besieged. There are far too many chainsaws and hunting rifles for a peaceful resolution.

Mozli

"The Moz," as those who've visited call it, is nowhere you want to go. If you end up here, either things went *horribly* wrong or you've been paid a *lot* of money. In either case, you're in an armed camp run by a megalomaniac (General Nur Jama) one misstep away from having somebody's government drop the boom on him (perhaps a very big badaboom). As a bonus, Mozli is a great place to catch the latest in unheard-of tropical diseases.

Action Items

Population: Mozli is small enough for a nuke or a sortie by a flight of conventional bombers to wipe out; it's also fatally susceptible to bioweapons, which would affect nearly everyone overnight, though probably not *kill* them all. Extend its +1 search modifier to attempts to hide in the shantytown; apply -1 to Chase Rolls through it, as the noise penalty for *acoustic* listening, and to attempts to impose anything resembling training. Angry locals resist rabble-rousing with Will 12.

Physical Environment: **Survival (Jungle)** would take a long hike to matter, given the level of slashing and burning. Rain routinely turns it all to muck: ×0.2 Move. Either way, **Tracking** is unpenalized on the soft dirt. Dangers include

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Camp 23, 2021

Population: 850 (Search -2)

Physical and Magical Environment

Terrain: Woodlands
Appearance: Average (0)   **Hygiene:** 0
No Mana (No Enchantment)

Culture and Economy

Language: English   **Literacy:** Native
TL: 8
Wealth: Average (×1)   **Status:** -1 to 1

Political Environment

Government: Corporate State, Charismatic Rule, Free City
CR: 2 (Corruption -1)
Military Resources: $11,050   **Defense Bonus:** +4

Notes

Camp 23 is an isolated, good-sized logging camp in the Pacific Northwest. Everybody here works for Western Timber, and while many laborers struggle to get by (Status -1), nobody is out of work. There are no rich folks, either. Fraser Pfeifer, the well-liked senior union rep (Status 1), ensures that Western pays everybody; he effectively runs the place (explaining Corruption -1, despite the lack of big-city crime), but he's "just one of the crew."

Camp 23 is the private property of Western, not a chartered municipality. It runs *very* fast and loose for a corporate facility (CR2) because Pfeifer negotiated a deal that amounts to "Leave us in peace and you'll get your logs." It has CR1 for mobilization; Military Resources pay four security guards who technically work for Western but do anything Pfeifer says. *Anything.*

Search rolls related to lumber, lumberjacks, or logging vehicles or tools are at +3 in Camp 23.

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mines, obstacles (razor wire and stakes), unexploded ordnance, and tropical diseases – but *animals* avoid the stinking place! The GM could interpret the -2 for Appearance as BAD for anyone or anything, as it reflects a war-torn area where everybody is armed and hard-bitten. Mozli is *very* likely to be ground zero of an outbreak, dealt with at -3 for Hygiene – and the GM could have those who drink the water roll at HT-3 to avoid a minor illness.

Culture: "Mozlian" is a placeholder language that should be replaced with something that suits the region (e.g., Arabic, Kongo, Somali, or Swahili). To keep the story moving, toss in a few speakers of colonial languages (especially English or French). The literacy rate hovers at just above 50%; rolls for social interactions or research that rely on writing are at -1. When looking around, there's a 12 or less chance that crude signage shows the way. Mozli is on average TL7, so rolls to find TL8 gear or that rely on local networks are at -1, but those to circumvent local security systems are at *+1* for TL8 sneaks.

Economy: Mozli's economy runs on payoffs and gig-work. "Generic" bribes produce results for *half* the customary amounts (Jama, however, is Filthy Rich and costs 100 times normal!). Those who can stand slumming it here run out of cash only half as fast ($250/week), but also get paid half as much and may have to accept TL7 replacement gear. For Mozli's Status -2 to 2 inhabitants, **Streetwise** is the go-to social skill. The military aspirations of the local elite mean that even though their forces are a rabble, Status 3 or 4 interactions require **Savoir-Faire (Military),** *not* (High Society).

Political Environment: Jama's military dictatorship makes Mozli a magnet for black ops by the surrounding nation, neighboring countries, and – whenever they get word of terrorists or new diseases, or fear for stability – the West. As Mozli is a de facto city-state that acknowledges *none* of these powers, "what happens in the Moz stays in the Moz," and anything goes. The CR situation is volatile because the place is so used to action violence (and all other kinds) that it goes unnoticed, but if *Jama* gets mad – boom, have -6 to BAD. In that vein, the GM can reverse Corruption and give +6 to shady deals that Jama doesn't care about, but invert that to BAD -6 if they provoke the militia (Jama or otherwise).

Military Capabilities: Military Resources rate Mozli – meaning Jama – as a 10-point Patron most of the way to a 15-point one. This implies a -15- or -20-point Enemy. That gives BAD -3 or -5, which isn't as bad as the -6 that CR and Corruption give, but which could be *cumulative* up to, say, -10: Jama is no high-tech agency, but locally, he's judge, jury, executioner, general, and crime boss, so defying him is *suicidal* without significant strategizing to accumulate bonuses. The DB +5 mostly matters on military adventures – Mozli's shantytown is too porous to keep drifters out (it isn't even fenced) – but when alerted to hostiles, the full -5 to attempts to get in applies, as military pickets are posted on all approaches.

Other Notes: Most buildings in Mozli are one-story shacks. There's so much junk and rubble strewn about that climbing onto roofs is easy – one **Climbing** roll at *no* penalty, or a *Leg Up* (**Exploits,** p. 19), gets you there. *Questionable Construction* (**Dictionary of Danger,** p. 7) definitely applies, inside and on top. There *is* cellular service, electricity, and other infrastructure, but *Sabotage* (**Exploits,** p. 25) rolls against it are at +2, as it's already halfway broken.

Mozli, 2021

Population: 25,000 (Search +1)

Physical and Magical Environment

Terrain: Jungle
Appearance: Ugly (-2) **Hygiene:** -3
No Mana (No Enchantment)

Culture and Economy

Language: Mozlian **Literacy:** Accented
TL: 7
Wealth: Struggling (×1/2) **Status:** -2 to 4

Political Environment

Government: Dictatorship, Military Government, City-State
CR: 6 (Corruption -6)
Military Resources: $13.1M **Defense Bonus:** +5

Notes

"The Moz" is a stereotypical African hellhole (Africa is *huge,* meaning the GM can put Mozli anywhere – replace "Mozlian" with a suitable language). There was once a community here, and even light industry, but brutal fighting reduced it to a burned-out shantytown, the only constants being jungle diseases, flyblown cadavers, and tears. Reduced Appearance, Literacy, TL, Wealth (which would drop to Poor without the local warlord), and especially Hygiene reflect this.

General Nur Jama (Status 4, from Wealth and questionable Military Rank) is the latest warlord to control Mozli; so far, no national government has challenged his de facto city-state. Mozli is CR6 (Wartime) for mobilization, but *CR0* for how Jama's goons treat everybody besides Jama, which also accounts for Corruption -6. Military Resources reflect a horde of irregulars bristling with Cold War surplus, while DB +5 is for the bunkers and tunnels guarding all approaches to town.

Mozli is an armed camp, so search rolls for *TL7* weapons – or thugs for hire – are at +2. The only TL8 hardware is in the hands of Jama's personal bodyguards: foreign mercs.

In Action

General Chaos. General Nur Jama is a bona fide bad guy. No self-respecting action hero would work for him, but lots of people would pay to have him removed: whoever he defeated to take Mozli, the national government he's defying, a *foreign* power that fears regional instability, even fed-up subjects. And when you need to get rid of a warlord who has the best bodyguards dirty money can buy, who do you call? Get ready to fight!

Our Man in Hell. Mozli is the kind of place where spies might be sent and need to be extracted. Some people *willingly* come here to hide from their past or do something heinous out in the open. For whatever reason, a person of interest is in the Moz . . . and the heroes get the job of tracking them down and possibly pulling them out. That's hard at best, harder if the target is uncooperative, hardest if that person is in league with Jama.

Outbreak! A jungle town with open sewers into which the militia dumps the bodies of those who don't respect them – what could *possibly* go wrong? The next pandemic, that's what. The heroes are ordered into the hot zone, and the job calls for more than medics, because Jama sees red crosses as targets. Guns, cash, and a knack for sweet-talking the power-mad are essential. Tick tock, because Plan B is incinerating the Moz from the air.

Tazhicheng

Action is a genre of stereotypes, and Tazhicheng ("City of Towers") plays on many of these: Parkour chases through crowded areas that resemble Hong Kong's late Kowloon Walled City, noodle carts to upset, stern cops reminiscent of the old Shanghai Police, the modern towers of international businesses, and every martial art in Southeast Asia. This is a place for heroes to live and work – or for foreign agents to visit on secret missions.

Action Items

Population: Tazhicheng has a densely packed core holding 1.3 million inhabitants – terrorists would target that, and nerve gas or a modest nuke could plausibly cause 80%+ casualties (call it a million). The GM should consider using an extended search modifier of +4, if not +6, to hasten searches where multiple attempts would be boring. Use +3 for attempts to hide in the crowd, get away with swiping things, or train people (there are *many* great candidates); -3 for penalties caused by crowds (e.g., in chases) and as the noise penalty for any kind of surveillance; but the full -4 or -6 as BAD for local police. Go with the standard Will 12 to resist rabble-rousing – crowds here aren't prone to rioting.

Physical Environment: The built-up area tapers off so gradually that **Urban Survival** is all that matters. On city streets, Move is unaffected but **Tracking** is at -6! The port is ideal for underwater action sequences, boat chases, and dumping corpses, but sheltered enough to avoid nautical dangers other than drowning and man-made hazards (cranes, ropes, winches etc.). The GM could interpret Hygiene -1 as an excuse for a HT-1 roll to resist a minor illness after swimming in the harbor, and impose an extra -1 to resist yucky stuff in dumpsters and sewers.

Culture: The official language is Chinese – specifically Mandarin – but most people understand English (mandatory in schools), and there are significant Cantonese, Filipino, Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Malay, Tamil, and Thai communities. Literacy is nigh universal, and signs are in Chinese and English at least, and often more languages. Though Tazhicheng is TL8, the GM might choose to include flavor in the form of TL6-7 relics owned by older citizens – you can hotwire a decrepit car or houseboat at +1 or +3, but you'll have -1 or -3 in the chase!

Economy: Tazhicheng is a vast cosmopolis with broad Wealth and Status profiles. No special rules are needed – although **Merchant** is applicable in more situations than usual, and the GM might let it work in any interaction where it doesn't seem downright wrong (as it would be when dealing with the police or the governor).

Political Environment: Tazhicheng is democratic enough that heroes can work for it – fighting crime (domestic and foreign) and Chinese spies – without hating themselves. But the fact that the place is so *bureaucratic* means adventures are sometimes less John Woo and more John le Carré; it can be a wilderness of mirrors. Yet in a free city, people who do "interesting" jobs ultimately answer to the governor,

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Tazhicheng, 2021

Population: 6,500,000 (Search +3)

Physical and Magical Environment

Terrain: Island/Beach, Jungle inland
Appearance: Average (0)   **Hygiene:** -1
No Mana (No Enchantment)

Culture and Economy

Language: Mandarin   **Literacy:** Native
TL: 8
Wealth: Average (×1)   **Status:** -2 to 6

Political Environment

Government: Representative Democracy, Bureaucracy, Free City
CR: 4 (Corruption 0)
Military Resources: $84.5M   **Defense Bonus:** +4

Notes

The City of Towers is often described as being a little like a cross between Hong Kong before the handover and a dirty, freewheeling Singapore. The GM could place it on any coast on the outside rim of the Chinese sphere in Southeast Asia. It's on a small bit of land and thus *crowded;* this and nearby jungle make it somewhat unhealthy (Hygiene -1).

Tazhicheng is administered by an elected governor (Status 6), currently Lee Lam, who oversees a domineering-but-honest bureaucracy (CR4 and Corruption 0) that operates semi-autonomously from the surrounding nation. In effect, the city is its own province. It's CR1 for mobilization, its generous Military Resources representing a bewildering number of police services: City Police, Border Patrol, Port Service, and even a municipal Counterespionage Bureau.

The city is a hub for maritime trade (+2 to search rolls), and a hotbed of both Chinese defectors and Chinese spies (+2 to search rolls).

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which can appeal to gamers who dislike being cogs in a vast machine with faceless controllers. On the CR front, this is a place where heroic actions are never penalized but irresponsible ones generate -4 to BAD or Assistance Rolls, and where *foreign* actors who take on the authorities have an extra -4 BAD to deal with (-6, if using that for the local police as noted earlier).

Military Capabilities: Military Resources put Tazhicheng at 15 points as a Patron, but that's strictly the police; the GM could round up to 20 points for the city. Turned Enemy, that's -20 or -25 points. Call it BAD -5 for the cops or -6 for all departments, and use the *worst* of this and the other BAD values suggested above, unless the adventure is meant to be impossible. Go with -5 to illicit entry for the police at the borders *instead of* the -2 or -4 implied by Defense Bonus – the Border Patrol is exceptional.

Other Notes: Tazhicheng is famous for its gleaming skyscrapers; these are suitable for snipers, extreme feats of *Climbing* (**Exploits,** pp. 18-19), and even parachutes and gliders (**Exploits,** p. 18). Most stand well over 100 yards tall, the highest reaching 530 yards; when assessing falling damage, assume terminal falls (12d). Labyrinthine older areas are perfect for any and all *Parkour* (**Exploits,** pp. 19-20) – often at a bonus for the many handholds offered by years of bolted-on hardware. Other key features are a subway, a tramway, a bustling port full of huge cranes, a harbor crammed with old houseboats, and street vendors *everywhere*.

In Action

Defective Work. Tazhicheng is physically close enough to the People's Republic of China and politically close enough to the West for a defector to use it as a gateway from the former to the latter. The heroes have been dispatched to bring in such a person – but first, they must find someone hiding out in a dense urban jungle. Chinese spies and the overbearing Counterespionage Bureau are sure to complicate matters!

On the Lam. Border Patrol, City Police, Counterespionage Bureau, Port Service . . . at times, even Governor Lee Lam gets a headache. With bureaucratic flair, he has chartered an agency that draws members from all the others to fight crime by any means necessary. This is a task force campaign (**Heroes,** p. 6) where everyone has the law enforcement or security lens (**Heroes,** p. 5) and 10-point Legal Enforcement Powers.

Parkour Patrol. Despite Tazhicheng's relative lack of corruption, the city is still home to greedy corporations, foreign interference, and squalid areas that aren't getting their fair share. The heroes have taken such matters into their own hands. This is a vigilante justice campaign (**Heroes,** p. 6) with PCs created using **GURPS Action 3: Furious Fists,** many – even most – choosing the traceur template (**Furious Fists,** p. 9).

TOMORROW

Few people visit Tomorrow on a whim. They come to find work, seek medical help, or investigate the best questionable medical practices money can buy. The place is a "technopolis" and obnoxiously on the grid, but also *physically* isolated. Adventures here involve a discordant mix of a wired surveillance society and nagging reminders of the no-tech desert waiting just outside with scorching days, bitter nights, and corpse-eating buzzards.

Action Items

Population: While small, Tomorrow sprawls through the desert, with many structures behind significant relief and much of the Tomorrow, LLC facilities underground; a nuke might cause only 25% casualties. Bioweapons are unlikely to work . . . unless tailored to the area, possibly by the clinic itself. The locals are smart and happy, and resist rabble-rousing with Will 13.

Physical Environment: **Survival (Desert)** is essential for anyone straying out of town or approaching on foot; **Tracking** is at -2. The desert can be hard-packed (×1.25 Move), broken (×0.5 Move), or hilly and sandy (×0.2 Move); optionally, roll 1d×0.2 for this. *None* of that matters in town. Besides the desert climate, dangers include bark scorpions, centipedes, rattlesnakes, spiders (brown and black widow), the occasional Gila monster, and biting ants; these *do* get into town (rumors of mutant lab animals are exaggerated). Read the +1 for Appearance as a bonus to find transportation here, the "attraction" being the gleaming medical facilities. At Hygiene +3, the GM should avoid casually inflicting health problems – but if the advanced labs engineer a plague deadly enough to thrive despite this, add -3 to resist!

Culture: Everybody here understands English and is literate. There are also visiting biomedical experts who can speak (or *hide* what they're saying) in almost any language found anywhere there's a university. Tomorrow is at the upper edge of TL8, so barring enemy action, tech should *always* work by the book.

Economy: Tomorrow is for the well-off. For a bribe to work at all, double it. Double the cost to sit around without work, too ($1,000/week). However, people here understand the value of discretion, and pay twice as much for *quiet* freelance work. As there isn't an underworld in the conventional sense, Streetwise is irrelevant. Company staff react best to **Administration** or **Merchant;** local cops, to **Savoir-Faire (Police);** and rich citizens, including company owner Ingrid Staedert, to **Savoir-Faire (High Society).**

Political Environment: The fun interplay here is between the de jure authority of the state and nation (because Tomorrow *is* just another municipality), and the de facto clout of Tomorrow, LLC. The company must hide much of what it does, creating openings for outside investigators; the governments collect a lot of tax money and have no *real* crime to investigate, giving the company more leeway than is just. Citizens who work for and get significant benefits from the company are reluctant to rock this boat. Subtlety is key; open violence instantly triggers -4 to BAD or puts pressure on employers that causes -4 to Assistance rolls. Corruption gets complicated – Very Wealthy people get +3 to solicit illegal services from the company, and richer ones get +4, but the reversed value is the BAD when *interfering* with such clients (that is, BAD is -3 or -4 for the bodyguards and company security around such people).

Military Capabilities: Military Resources make Tomorrow out to be a feeble Patron in matters of force – call it 10 points. And its tiny police force would be a -15-point Enemy for action heroes, offering BAD -3, rising to -4 when Tomorrow, LLC security steps in as hinted at above. That's about right, but Tomorrow, LLC is more interesting, and based on Staedert's fortune ("a billionaire") might be a 15-point Patron or a -20-point Enemy that gives BAD -5. The DB of +4 arises rarely, but Tomorrow *is* in open, quiet desert in the middle of nowhere, with cameras everywhere, so stealthy approaches are difficult and at the usual -3 noted for the police, increasing to -4 for DB when they're alerted.

Other Notes: Tomorrow is futuristic, without old-city scenery like alleyways, decrepit buildings, junkyards, street vendors, trams, and utility poles. However, it has extensive underground engineering: utilities, access tunnels, even entire labs. Many buildings have independent solar and wind power, rendering *Cutting Power* (**Exploits,** p. 25) pointless. Most important, if the GM wants to introduce *M Is for Medical* (**Dictionary of Danger,** pp. 22-23), biomedical MacGuffins (**Exploits,** p. 44), the dawn of TL9 biomedicine, or even bioengineering, mind control, mutants, or secret formulas (**Dictionary of Danger,** pp. 27-28) created by mad science (**GURPS Action 8: Twists,** pp. 6-8), there's no place like Tomorrow!

TOMORROW, 2021

Population: 5,000 (Search 0)

Physical and Magical Environment

Terrain: Desert
Appearance: Attractive (+1)   **Hygiene:** +3
No Mana (No Enchantment)

Culture and Economy

Language: English   **Literacy:** Native
TL: 8
Wealth: Comfortable (×2)   **Status:** 1 to 6

Political Environment

Government: Corporate State, Socialist, Municipality
CR: 4 (Corruption 0 to -4)
Military Resources: $130,000   **Defense Bonus:** +4

Notes

The Sospital Group medical consortium (see **GURPS Boardroom and Curia: The Sospital Group**) sited a lab and clinic in the U.S. Southwest and called it Tomorrow, LLC. The town is named for it. Search rolls for biomedical experts, procedures, and equipment are at +2 – rising to +3 for Very Wealthy seekers, *+4* for the Filthy Rich or better. Uncoincidentally, Corruption is 0 on the surface, but -3 for the Very Wealthy, -4 for anyone richer.

Tomorrow is clean (CR4 public-health measures), and pretty in a sterile way (Attractive). This, the desert, and borderline-TL9 healthcare free to all municipal taxpayers explain its absurd Hygiene (+3). Tomorrow also bills itself as "crime free." Its CR1 for mobilization generates Military Resources that reflect a police force of 25 – five per 1,000 inhabitants, compared to 3.5 nationally.

You'd think everybody would want to live here, but the only people who can *afford* to are doctors, scientists, and executives and their families (all Status 1+), including company owner and billionaire Ingrid Staedert (Status 6, mostly from Wealth and Business Rank). Everyone else commutes. Thus, it's an *effective* corporate state, though chartered as an ordinary town.

In Action

Live to See Tomorrow. If one or more of the team are critically wounded on a mission, they may need more help than their medic can provide. Maybe they don't *have* a medic. Perhaps their bosses cover TomorrowCare™ as part of their healthcare plan. At any rate (probably a steep one), they end up here. The injured get healed quickly; the others have "side quests," probably leading to entanglements with company security (below).

The Tomorrow People. Despite its community's small size, Tomorrow, LLC is big business with global ties. The heroes work for it, and they *aren't* town cops. As company security, they interfere with various nosy U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) agencies, handle crazy rich people (many of them detoxing), and thwart almost daily industrial espionage. This is a typical **Action** campaign with an atypical boss.

Tomorrow's Where You Die. What is Tomorrow, LLC actually *doing* out here? The heroes could be HHS agents looking into unethical or illegal medical practices, IRS agents looking into questionable business practices, or plain old federal cops looking into the affairs of Tomorrow's elite, law-defying clientele. The town is sure to turn Stepford Wives on them, and if the GM wants, there might be *actual* mad science to investigate.

URBOPOLIS

Huge, dirty, dark, corrupt – what's not to like? Urbopolis works best as the setting for an entire campaign that rarely leaves the city; there's plenty to do on all sides of the law. Then again, it's a trucking hub, so people are always passing through, possibly including the heroes. However it's used, any action trope that would work in Chicago or New York can be exported here (as long as it doesn't involve a port!).

Action Items

Population: Urbopolis sprawls, and the densest areas aren't where most people *live;* it would take multiple, serious WMD to surpass 10% casualties. The GM should consider an extended search modifier of +4 or +5 to speed up searches where multiple attempts would get tiresome. Use +3 for cover-ups, stealing things in busy areas, and attempts to train residents in *criminal* skills; -3 for most penalties caused by crowds (such as in chases), and as the acoustic and electronic noise penalty;

but the full -4 or -5 as BAD for local criminals. Perpetually tired, grumpy locals resist rabble-rousing with Will 10.

Physical Environment: The urban and industrial wasteland goes on forever; just use **Urban Survival.** On city streets, Move is unaffected (unless there's roadwork . . .), but **Tracking** is at -6! There's a small creek downtown that could matter in chases or when disposing of things. Almost all local dangers are human – the GM could interpret the -1 for Appearance as BAD related to ordinary citizens, who are ornery due to the grittiness and venality of their hometown. It could also justify badly lit areas that give at least +1 to **Stealth.**

Culture: As in any U.S. metropolis, almost everybody understands English and is literate. Also as usual, there are immigrant neighborhoods where people communicate in Chinese, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Vietnamese, etc. – apply the usual rules in such areas.

Economy: Urbopolis has a large enough range of Wealth and Status to use the rules as written. Many situations involve mobsters and thus call for **Savoir-Faire (Mafia);** this can stand in for **Streetwise** (which still works normally), as street-level criminals truly fear the mob. Crooked cops require **Savoir-Faire (Police),** but the mayor and councilors *definitely* demand **Savoir-Faire (High Society).**

Political Environment: A consummate U.S. metropolis, The Big Dirty supports a wide gamut of classic action adventures. The heroes could be city police, a heist crew, federal officers investigating RICO cases or terrorist threats, vigilantes who love their town, and more. The complicating factor is the effective oligarchy formed by Mayor Ortiz and the City Council, who tie cops' hands, demand a piece of any action, obstruct outsiders, and lean on gangs whose turf doesn't align with district borders. Urbopolis is accepting of (and accustomed to) action violence, so CR isn't *usually* an issue, but reckless driving and careless shootings that endanger taxpayers trigger -3 to BAD or Assistance Rolls. Corruption gives +2 to general shadiness that doesn't step on toes, like buying guns from the right cartel or bribing the right detective, but -2 *cumulative* with any other BAD once someone is offended.

Military Capabilities: The Military Resources of Urbopolis are consistent with a 15-point Patron and a -20-point Enemy – quite enough unless the GM waxes ultra-cinematic. The resulting BAD -5 is what happens when the police are the bad guys, and unlikely to be cumulative with the suggested -4 or -5 for the mob, although it could worsen by -2 if someone tries to bribe the wrong cop (as often "this officer expected more" as "this officer isn't on the take"). As for slipping in undetected, use the -5 for the police if the force is alerted and setting up roadblocks; if not, *don't* inflict the -2 implied by DB +4, because Urbopolis earns money by turning a blind eye to questionable trucking and has too much road traffic to monitor constantly.

URBOPOLIS, 2021

Population: 3,000,000 (Search +3)

Physical and Magical Environment

Terrain: Plains
Appearance: Unattractive (-1) **Hygiene:** 0
No Mana (No Enchantment)

Culture and Economy

Language: English **Literacy:** Native
TL: 8
Wealth: Average (×1) **Status:** -2 to 6

Political Environment

Government: Representative Democracy, Oligarchy, Municipality
CR: 3 (Corruption -2)
Military Resources: $39M **Defense Bonus:** +4

Notes

Home to three million people and much crime and industry, Urbopolis is the stereotypical U.S. metropolis. It's nickname, "The Big Dirty," refers to Corruption (-2) more than grime: The municipality's 12 districts are the fiefs of councilors who've been incumbent forever, and who fear little but mayor Juana Ortiz, whose wealth, family, and family wealth make her the state governor's social equal (Status 6).

Though not *clean* – the beautification budget lines various pockets – Urbopolis isn't a cesspool (Unattractive, but Hygiene 0). Great wealth is in very few hands, meaning lots of poverty (Struggling or Poor citizens with Status -1 or -2). Military Resources from CR1 for mobilization fund a police force with many costly toys (like weapons and vehicles) but few cops, and fewer honest ones (remember: Corruption -2).

Urbopolis rises like a wart from the surrounding farmland – the GM decides where. It has strong labor unions (+2 to search rolls) tied to organized crime (+1 to search rolls). It's also a trucking hub; transportation to and from is easy to find (+2 to search rolls), no matter the cargo.

Other Notes: Urbopolis is an older North American city with wooden utility poles, steel signposts, fireplugs, alleyways in high-density districts, back lanes in low-density ones, a subway downtown, elevated rail out to the burbs, and perpetual roadworks. There are skyscrapers 400+ yards tall for epic *Climbing* (**Exploits,** pp. 18-19), but most are older and shorter; a fall from any means 12d damage. Street *vendors* are prohibited (some operate anyway); street *performers* and panhandlers are legion. Money transforms the landscape, with bollards and concrete features (benches and planters) heavy enough to stop cars springing up around financial and government buildings, and trees (and speed bumps "to protect our children") dotting rich neighborhoods. Encircling everything is a broad belt where *I Is for Industrial* and *J Is for Junk* (**Dictionary of Danger,** pp. 17-19).

In Action

Street Sweepers. There aren't *many* honest cops in Urbopolis, but there are a few – our heroes. They try to make the streets safer while fighting corruption in their department and treading softly around the mayor and her cronies. The result is a brotherhood in blue campaign (**Heroes,** p. 5) where Assistance Rolls aren't granted often. This being **Action,** there are lots of car chases and shootouts – sometimes even with crooks.

The Big Dirty. The players might prefer the criminal lens (**Heroes,** p. 4). To get into the interesting stuff, they shouldn't be gangbangers, but mobsters with ties to dishonest cops and perhaps City Hall. Shamelessly swipe the plots of your favorite gangster movies for adventures. As a twist, the protagonists could be independents (for a caper campaign), have hearts of gold (vigilante justice of sorts), or occupy a gray zone (troubleshooters).

We Are the Night. A big, corrupt city whose police officers are either overworked or dishonest is ideal for a vigilante justice campaign (**Heroes,** p. 6). The heroes do most the stuff in *Street Sweepers,* but without a badge. Some might have the traceur template (**Furious Fists,** p. 9) to navigate the urban jungle. Foes include street gangs protecting their turf, mobsters whose businesses take losses, and dirty cops paid to prevent such problems. Good luck!

VES

Ves is a collage of stereotypes of European cities found in Hollywood and Hong Kong action flicks: ski lodges and vineyards for villains to use as headquarters, old money and swanky casinos to draw grifters and gamblers, and narrow cobbled streets and stubborn local police to ensure dangerous car chases. All set against a backdrop that would fit into *Ronin,* the European scenes of the Bourne movies, and most of the Bond franchise.

Action Items

Population: Ves has significant relief, and parts would be shadowed from blasts by mountains, while vineyards and chalets would be protected by distance; a nuke might cause only 25% casualties, mostly in the denser "old town." Apply its +2 search modifier to cover-ups (at least if you believe conspiracy

There are moments of great luxury in the life of a secret agent. There are assignments on which he is required to act the part of a very rich man; occasions when he takes refuge in good living to efface the memory of danger and the shadow of death.
— Ian Fleming, **Live and Let Die**

theorists who claim Ves is an Illuminati powerbase), attempts to hide or pick pockets in crowds of tourists, and rolls to train well-educated locals; use -2 for Chase Rolls along narrow, winding, sightseer-filled streets. Mixed throngs of residents and visitors resist rabble-rousing with Will 11; citizens, at the usual Will 12.

Physical Environment: Anybody thinking about hiking, skiing, or mountaineering (whether for sport or infiltration/exfiltration) outside town should think twice without **Climbing, Skiing,** and **Survival (Mountain).** Use Move ×0.2 out there, except on skis (no penalty, and perhaps a bonus on downhills). **Tracking** is at -2. The biggest danger is avalanches. *Definitely* read the +3 for Appearance as a bonus to find flights here – airlines hard-sell expensive trips to Ves! Hygiene +1 applies to resist even the most disgusting stuff here ("That hot tub is *nasty!*").

Magical Environment: If anybody has magical powers or artifacts, it's the Illuminati, who've been linked to Ves. The GM is welcome to raise mana and enchantment levels to support this.

Culture: "Veznó" is a placeholder language – replace it with the tongue of any region in Europe that has mountains (Bulgarian, German, Italian, Romanian, Slovene, . . .). The population is *eminently* literate, and most also speak and read English for the tourists. In fact, there are so many tourists that signs include English, French, German, Russian, and Turkish, along with icons for everybody else. The odds of running into communications problems are remote, which is for the best in place tailor-made for social engineering.

Economy: Bribery obeys a complex code in Ves – double the usual amounts, but *cash* is gauche unless tipping the help, casino chips are acceptable only at the casino, and the customary inducement is an equal sum spent on something like a prestigious vintage, a fashion original, tickets to an invitation-only event, or a donation to a cause. Out-of-work freelancers will want savings (losing $1,000/week). Freelance work doesn't pay extra, as the rich regard it as déclassé, though faithful *servants* are paid up to double. There *are* Status -1 and 0 street criminals who require **Streetwise,** but most are petty pickpockets and nightclub drug dealers. Classy cat burglars, gamblers, jewel thieves, etc. are better targeted with **Savoir-Faire (High Society)** – as is Princess Ilona. The gendarmerie deem themselves soldiers: **Savoir-Faire (Military),** please.

Political Environment: Tension is inevitable when a monarchy like Princess Ilona's is obligated to conform to external, democratic rule like an ordinary city. There's sure to be string-pulling and compromise, and the heroes could easily get involved – but in a *classy* way that suits tuxedos, expensive cars, and royalty. This also means that Ves is a place where anything but the most circumspect of questionable acts faces an extra -3 to BAD, and where open recklessness brings that or -3 to Assistance Rolls; on the other hand, the gendarmerie respect gallantry, so don't do this if everything is in aid of foiling a heinous villain! Corruption shouldn't arise except with *huge* bribes (100× usual or more); then there's +1 to ease the rules. The gendarmerie are straitlaced, though; trying to bribe them means that whatever BAD was, it's -1 worse now.

Military Capabilities: Ves, which means "Princess Ilona" (a multimillionaire but not a billionaire), is a solid 10-point Patron, but shouldn't be more – it's a charming destination for jetsetters, not Doomstadt. That puts Enemy value at -15 points, thought the GM *could* nudge this up to -20 points because the gendarmerie always get their man. That's BAD -3 (the same implied by CR) or -5 (a cinematic exaggeration for superspy adventures). Use the last two values as penalties to illicit entry attempts, too; but when the gendarmerie are actively alerted, or throw somebody in the (literal!) dungeon, that DB +7 turns into -7 for the heroes. It also works as usual against military assaults, should someone wish to attack a fortress uphill.

Other Notes: The old town enables Hide, Mobility Escape, Stunt, and Stunt Escape chase maneuvers with steep slopes, meandering streets linked by iron-railed staircases, sidewalk cafés, dangerous drivers on Vespas, and cobbled lanes where only two-wheeled vehicles fit (tip that car!). Most structures are stone or wrought iron, and *will* stop a car. Arches over narrow streets – and stark cliffs above and below town – entertain *Climbing* (**Exploits,** pp. 18-19), *Parkour* (**Exploits,** pp. 19-20), and deadly falls (12d). Due to Ves's isolation, the GM could (and in a Cold War throwback campaign, *should*) make it easy to cut off, but it's rich enough to level the top of a mountain to build an airport, put laser telecom towers on its highest peaks, and build a nuclear reactor deep in the rock – all good news for villains with doomsday devices.

In Action

Going Downhill Fast. Remoteness, affluence, and slap-on-the-wrist enforcement for the elite make Ves a paradise for rich villains. That includes one of the campaign's big bads, using a mountain chalet or vineyard manor as a cover for global crime, terrorism, even mad science. The heroes come bringing justice in an adventure that starts with an unfriendly wager at the casino and ends in a breakneck ski chase through an avalanche!

Illuminati? There's no Illuminati – that would be silly. Of course, that's what They would want you to think. If there *is* a conspiracy in the campaign, it's sure to involve rich people whose money and bloodlines have been around for a long time. People like local ruler Princess Ilona. Clues are everywhere: in the insignia of the royal gendarmerie, in the caves of old vineyards, in the princess's ancestral home. Don't get caught.

The Price of Priceless. A crew who pull capers hear about a lucrative score: one of Ves's many historical treasures (some of which date to the 9th century). The catch? It's in Princess Ilona's castle, protected by steep drops, high-tech alarms, and a detachment of the royal gendarmerie. Getting it out of *there* is a major adventure; getting it out of *Ves* is sure to involve speeding along dangerous mountain roads, or the ever-popular ski chase.

Ves, 2021

Population: 90,000 (Search +2)

Physical and Magical Environment

Terrain: Mountain
Appearance: Beautiful (+3) **Hygiene:** +1
No Mana (No Enchantment)

Culture and Economy

Language: Veznó **Literacy:** Native
TL: 8
Wealth: Comfortable (×2) **Status:** -1 to 6

Political Environment

Government: Dictatorship (Monarchy), Municipality
CR: 3 (Corruption -1)
Military Resources: $2.34M **Defense Bonus:** +7

Notes

Nestled in the highlands of its European home (the GM picks where, changing "Veznó" to the local tongue), Ves is the historical capital of a principality. Though no longer a city-state, it retains a monarch: Princess Ilona (Status 6), beloved but totally in charge. Other historical relics are charming architecture (Beautiful) and medieval mountain fortifications (DB +7).

The only ways in are a treacherous road, tourist flights, and a pass accessible by ski, yet many visit, as Ves enjoys clean mountain air (Hygiene +1), ski slopes above, vineyards below, and fantastic casinos, hotels, restaurants, and spas. Search rolls for *any* of these industries receive a bonus equal to the inquirer's Status/2 (rounded down). Predictably, Ves is well-off – most ordinary citizens are Comfortable, and there are no "street people" (minimum Status -1).

National law requires Ilona to run Ves as a municipality (CR3), not a personal domain (historically CR5). Thus, it's CR1 for mobilization. The Military Resources provide a smartly uniformed-but-serious "royal gendarmerie" equivalent to small battalion of good-quality ski infantry. Enough money can *slightly* relax the law for rich visitors Ilona likes (Corruption -1).

INDEX

Vincent: Tell you the truth, whenever I'm here I can't wait to leave. It's too sprawled out, disconnected. You know? That's me. You like it?
Max: It's my home.
Vincent: 17 million people. This was a country, it'd be the fifth biggest economy in the world and nobody knows each other.
*– **Collateral** (2004)*